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ABSTRACT

This study examined parenting styles reported by middle-class families of 105 preschoolers between 3 and 5 years of age who had experienced varying amounts of full-time infant child care. Children had experienced one of the following conditions: (1) full-time nonparental care beginning before 9 months of age; (2) full-time nonparental care beginning after 9 months of age; and (3) no full-time nonparental care prior to 36 months of age. The preschoolers were observed in socioemotional interactions with peers and teachers, and mothers and teachers provided extensive ratings of the children's emotional social interactions. Maternal child rearing and discipline techniques were assessed for five parenting dimensions: parental nurturance, consistency, amount of parental control, type of control, and responsiveness to child input. Results revealed similarities in parenting practices and attitudes of all three groups. However, mothers of the early full-time infant care group were more likely to use reasoning and reminding their children about rules than were mothers whose children did not begin full-time care until 36 months of age. (MM)

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MATERNAL CHILDREARING PRACTICES WITH PRESCHOOLERS: RELATIONSHIP TO INFANT/TOODLER CARE PATTERNS

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Abstract

The present study examined parenting styles reported (via the Parenting Dimensions Inventory) by middle class families of 105 preschoolers who had experienced varying amounts of full time infancy care. Mothers did not differ on: nurturance, responsiveness to child input, consistency, and amount of parental control, nor on use of physical punishment or scolds. But mothers of the early fulltime infancy care group were more likely to use "reasoning" and reminding child about rules" than mothers whose children did not begin fulltime care until 36 months.

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Maternal Childrearing Practices with Preschoolers:
Relationship to Infant/Toddler Care Patterns?

During the past few years, some researchers have expressed fears that full-time infant/toddler care,the fastest growing segment of childcare, might be a risk factor that could lead to increased probability of insecure attachment of infants to their primary caregivers (Barglow, et al., 1987;Belsky & Rovine, 1988). Some clinicians have postulated parental withdrawal from intense positive interpersonal relationships with very young infants as a possible protective parental response to the pain of daily long separations in early infancy. Are there possible differences in parenting style beyond the infancy period that are associated with early infancy placement into fulltime nonparental care? The present research addresses this question.

Methods and Procedures

Subjects for this study were 105 three-to-five year old preschoolers from middle-class families. The children were assigned to one of three groups as a function of their early childcare history:(1) full-time nonparental care beginning before nine months of age, (2) full-time nonparental care beginning after nine months of age, and (3) no full-time nonparental care

prior to 36 months of age. The 53 boys and 52 girls were observed in socioemotional interactions with peers and teachers when they were preschoolers. Mothers and teachers (blind to the purposes of the research) provided extensive ratings of the children's emotional social interactions (Park & Honig, 1991).

Maternal childrearing and discipline techniques were assessed by means of the Parenting Dimensions Inventory (PDI) administered during a family visit. The PDI(Slater & Power, 1987) consists of 47 items that assess eight parenting dimensions. Items include a series of descriptive statements on 6-point scales. The statements assess parental nurturance, consistency, nonrestrictive attitude, and responsiveness to child input. The PDI also requires parents to rate the organization of their daily home routines as a family and the number of chores the child is regularly assigned in a variety of areas. Finally,parents indicate on Likert-type scales of the PDI how likely it is that they would use different types of discipline (such as let the child be, scold, spank, deprive of privilege, or discuss/reason).

Of the original eight parenting dimensions, five constructs Slater & Powers considered appropriate for children under six years of age, were scored for this study: nurturance, responsiveness to child input, consistency, amount of parental control, and type of parental control. To test whether there were any differences in maternal childrearing practices as a function of early child care history and sex of child, 2 x 3 (sex x group)

ANOVAs were conducted.

Results

PDI scores revealed similarities in parenting practices and attitudes among the mothers of the three study groups, regardless of whether time of entry of their preschooler into fulltime care had occurred in early infancy, in toddlerhood, or not until the end of the infant/toddler period. That is, middle class mothers across the three early care history groups did not differ in their parenting practices in terms of nurturing a child, responsiveness to child input, consistency in their parenting, or amount of control used. Frequency of physical punishment (rarely reported) and scolding were the same for the three groups. Significant although modest group differences were reported for some of the PDI dimensions that specified type of maternal control. Mothers of children in groups 1 and 3 reported significantly more use than group 2 mothers of "social consequences", such as sending a child to his or her room. Mothers of group 1 (M = 14.4) and 2 (M = 14. 2) children reported significantly greater use of "reasoning" techniques with their children compared with mothers of group 3 children (M = 13.4; $F[2, 90] = 4.25$, $p < .05$). When they disciplined their children, mothers of group 1 (M = 13.9) and group 2 (M = 14.4) were significantly more likely to "remind their child of rules" than mothers of group 3 children (M =13.0, $F[2, 90] = 3.64$, $p < .05$).

Mothers of boys and girls did not report differential parenting practices as a function of sex of child, regardless of

whether their preschoolers had entered fulltime childcare early in infancy or later. No significant sex x group interactions were found.

Discussion and Conclusions

No differences were reported by mothers of preschoolers who had entered earlier rather than later in infancy into fulltime nonparental childcare, on measures of maternal nurturance, responsivity to child input, consistency in parenting, and amount of control used. Mothers who used nonmaternal fulltime care early in the first year of life reported using "reasoning" and "reminding children of rules" significantly more than mothers of group 3 children who had not entered fulltime nonparental care until after the infant/toddler period. In these stable, middle class families using high quality preschool care, mothers who had chosen "other-work" as well as "mother-work" from the early infancy period onward may have made quite deliberate decisions to "make up" for their daily absence by use of more inductive patterns of childrearing and disciplining. Most of the children in this study were reared in fairly stable two-parent, college-educated families, who reported provision of positive parenting techniques on the PDI. Parents scored near ceiling on nurturance (mean of 32 out of possible 36 points) and on responsivity to their preschoolers (mean of 22 out of possible 24 scale points). Thus, in this sample of middle class families, early entry into fulltime nonparental infancy care showed no aversive effects on later parenting discipline and childrearing techniques during

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the preschool years. Indeed, parents who were "freed" by high quality infant/toddler care to participate in "other-work", seemed to show a tendency to use more inductive reasoning techniques in discipline than did mothers whose children had had no full time nonparental care experiences until the preschool years. Induction has been cited as a very effective parental technique for promoting coooperative, prosocial behaviors in young children (Baumrind, 1971).

More stressed families with fewer personal resources, including lower education and income, may reveal different parenting styles whether they use full time nonparental care earlier or later in the infant/toddler years. Or, further research may show that high quality stable child care is a support system which allow parents of all SES groups (through exposure to appropriate developmental practices of caregivers and teachers as well as through child development materials provided by child care facilities) to learn and practice more authoritative, inductive techniques, rather than authoritarian or laissez faire strategies. Unfortunately, even middle class families when stressed tend to choose poorer child care (Howes, 1990). Thus, we should be even more concerned with childcare choices and rearing styles of stressed families who are more vulnerable economically and educationally. Research results obtained in this study would suggest that helping stressed, low SES families to find and use high quality childcare very early in children's lives should be an urgent social priority. Such

support can have a positive impact not only on preschoolers' later academic outcomes, but on family learning of positive parenting skills and inductive discipline techniques.

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